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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: SPECIAL ENVOY CUMBER ENCOURAGES ASTANA TO
TAKE A STRONGER ROLE IN THE OIC

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: In a January 9 meeting with U.S. Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Sada Cumber, State Secretary Kanat Saudabayev underlined Kazakhstan's commitment to promoting inter-confessional understanding and expressed hope that the tradition of strong relations between the United States and Kazakhstan will continue under the new Administration. SE Cumber encouraged Kazakhstan to take a stronger role in the Muslim world and set an example as a moderate Muslim country. In a separate meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Nurlan Yermekbayev, Cumber proposed that Kazakhstan consider hosting the OIC's triennial summit of heads-of-state and take the lead in continuing Saudi Arabia's inter-faith dialogue initiative. Yermekbayev agreed that a slow and steady push from the moderate countries could change the "conservative spirit" within the OIC. END SUMMARY.

INTER-CONFESSIONAL ACCORD IS A TOP PRIORITY

¶3. (SBU) In a January 9 meeting in Astana with U.S. Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Sada Cumber, State Secretary Kanat Saudabayev noted that one of President Nursultan Nazarbayev's "top priorities" is to promote inter-confessional accord, and argued that this "wise policy" has allowed Kazakhstan to be the "lucky exception" among post-Soviet states in avoiding religious conflicts. He thanked the United States government for its support for Kazakhstan's international initiatives to promote inter-cultural and inter-confessional dialogue, including the Common World Forum and the Conference of World Religious Leaders. Saudabayev explained that Kazakhstan's growing international role was the decisive factor in its decision to bid for the 2010 chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the 2011 chairmanship of the OIC. He said that he assigns "great weight" to SE Cumber's visit. As he put it, "It is obvious that the United States sees us as a partner."

¶4. (SBU) SE Cumber responded that Kazakhstan and the United States share a commitment to supporting personal freedom in the context of a multi-ethnic state. Saudabayev assured Cumber that Kazakhstan has "no alternative" to such a policy. Kazakhstan chose the path toward democracy and a market economy and has made "gradual, but irreversible" progress since independence. In this time, Kazakhstan

has never had "major disagreements" with the United States, noted Saudabayev, but there have been times when the two disagreed on the pace of Kazakhstan's reforms. Perhaps not everybody in the United States government understands that Kazakhstan is moving as fast as "circumstances allow," he mused.

15. (SBU) SE Cumber favorably noted Kazakhstan's progress since independence and explained that the United States sometimes "pushes" Kazakhstan because it wants it to succeed. He told Saudabayev that Kazakhstan has solidified its leadership in Central Asia and expressed the hope that it would do the same in the Muslim world. "Central Asia is at the core of cosmopolitan Islamic values," he stressed, and Kazakhstan's upcoming 2011 OIC chairmanship is a chance to promote moderate Islam and counter the effects of radical "narrow" Islam. Instead of "investing in theocracy" like Saudi Arabia and Iran, Kazakhstan has chosen to invest in education and democratic development, stressed Cumber, and the Muslim world can learn from Kazakhstan's example.

APPRECIATION FOR PRESIDENT-ELECT OBAMA'S PHONE CALL

16. (SBU) Saudabayev agreed with SE Cumber that "there is a lack of closeness and understanding" among Muslim nations and that organizations like the OIC and the League of Arab States do not command great respect even among their founders. He praised President Bush for his "unprecedented" outreach to the Muslim world and advised the United States to "continue to highlight the examples of countries where democracy and Islam coexist." He told Cumber that he was "proud" that President Nazarbayev was one of the first world leaders to speak by telephone with President-elect Obama and expressed the hope that the new Administration will "continue our tradition of good relations." Cumber told Saudabayev that in his conversations with the Obama transition team, he named Kazakhstan as

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one of the four Muslim-majority countries President Obama should consider visiting within the first 100 days of taking office.

SECULAR COUNTRIES HAVE DIFFICULTLY BEING HEARD IN OIC

17. (SBU) In a separate meeting, Deputy Foreign Minister Nurlan Yermekbayev underlined that the government of Kazakhstan greatly appreciated Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad's attendance at the Common World Forum ministerial meeting in Astana in October 2008. Sharing his thoughts on the OIC, he said the organization has the potential to represent the whole spectrum of Islamic diversity, but he lamented that "secular countries have a hard time being heard." SE Cumber responded that moderate Muslim countries, like Kazakhstan, should take on a stronger role in the organization. He contended that the initiative of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia on inter-faith dialogue started off strong but has since lost steam. Cumber proposed that Kazakhstan take the lead on continuing the effort, noting that the Vatican seemed quite open to the idea when he raised it during a recent visit.

18. (SBU) SE Cumber welcomed the fact that Kazakhstan will host the 2011 OIC ministerial and encouraged Yermekbayev to think about hosting the triennial summit of OIC heads-of-state. Noting that the summit occurs once every three years and that the hosts for the next two summits have already been determined, he said that Kazakhstan "would have plenty of time" to prepare. Cumber suggested that Kazakhstan concentrate on two important issues: how to bring the Muslim world together, and how to encourage the "silent moderates" within the OIC. Yermekbayev welcomed Cumber's suggestions and said he would take them under serious consideration. He said that a slow, but steady, push from the moderates could "change the conservative spirit" within the OIC.

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